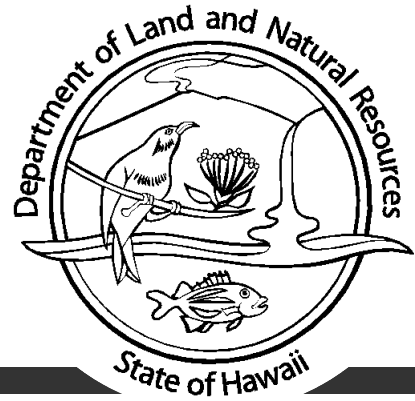


NEWS RELEASE

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DLNR HOLDS MOLOKA'I HEARING MARCH 7 ON REINTRODUCTION OF NENE

The nene, Hawai'i's beloved state bird, may once again become a resident of Moloka'i under a proposed agreement with state and federal governments and a private landowner. The Department of Land and Natural Resources invites the public to an information meeting and public hearing on Tuesday, March 7, 2000 on plans to reintroduce the nene, Hawai'i's state bird, on Moloka'i. The meeting will take place at 6:30 p.m. at Kilohana Intermediate School Cafeteria, Kilohana, Moloka'i.

DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife is holding the meeting to provide information and seek public comments on a proposed agreement between DLNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Pu'u O Hoku Ranch. The purpose of the cooperative government/private landowner "safe harbor" agreement is to establish a free-ranging population of 75 nene on Pu'u O Hoku Ranch, and a total of 200 nene elsewhere on Moloka'i, that will become a self-sustaining permanent population. If successful, this program will restore the nene to this part of its historical range, increase the current range and total population of nene in the state and speed the recovery of this endangered species. Re-introduction of nene on Kaua'i has led to establishment of a self-sustaining population.

"We are really excited about the opportunity to re-introduce the nene on Moloka'i, and want to make sure any local community concerns are addressed," said Michael Buck, Division of Forestry and Wildlife administrator.

Nene, also known as the Hawaiian goose, once lived, but do not currently exist in the wild on Moloka'i. Predation by rats, mongooses and feral dogs and commercial hunting were major contributors to the historic decline of nene statewide. In 1967 the nene were designated an endangered species due to low numbers. Successful captive breeding efforts and on-the-ground management have brought about an encouraging increase in the nene population. To ensure the recovery of nene in Hawai'i, the state is seeking to increase the number and sizes of areas it populates. Because the majority of good nene habitat is on private, not government-owned lands, a major step in the restoration of nene is to encourage their presence on private lands.

Pu'u O Hoku Ranch at Moloka'i's east end was selected because the ranch owners are willing to be partners with state and federal government, and because the ranch offers a large expanse of suitable habitat that can provide the core areas for nene to become established on the island and from which expansion to other appropriate habitat can be achieved. Under the agreement, the ranch will: maintain or improve significant

amounts of nene habitat for seven years by continuing cattle operations, which will maintain open, short grass habitat suitable for nene; assist DLNR to establish and maintain release sites; and assist DLNR to control predators around breeding and release sites.

The development of a program under the federal Endangered Species Act and state law encourages the assistance of private landowners in the recovery of threatened and endangered species in return for a "safe harbor", protection from any additional future incidental take liability under state and federal endangered species law.

Copies of the draft safe harbor agreement are available from the Division of Forestry and Wildlife Kalamaula Forestry Baseyard, Moloka'i, and online at: www.state.hi.us/dlnr/dofaw/pubs/index.html

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